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ABSTRACT

The 900 Schools Programme, adopted in March 1990, was designed to improve the quality of education in Chile's most impoverished public primary schools through "positive discrimination," the channeling of additional resources to the 969 schools that initially took part in the project. The 900 Schools Programme has sought to: (1) improve the infrastructure of schools; (2) conduct weekly in-service workshops for teachers; (3) provide specially-designed didactic materials for mathematics, reading, and writing instruction, along with technological improvements in the classroom; (4) make sure that all primary students have their own language, mathematics, and science textbooks; and (5) hold learning workshops after school for children with learning disabilities. Both the design and implementation of the 900 Schools Programme are discussed, as well as evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of the project. (MDM)

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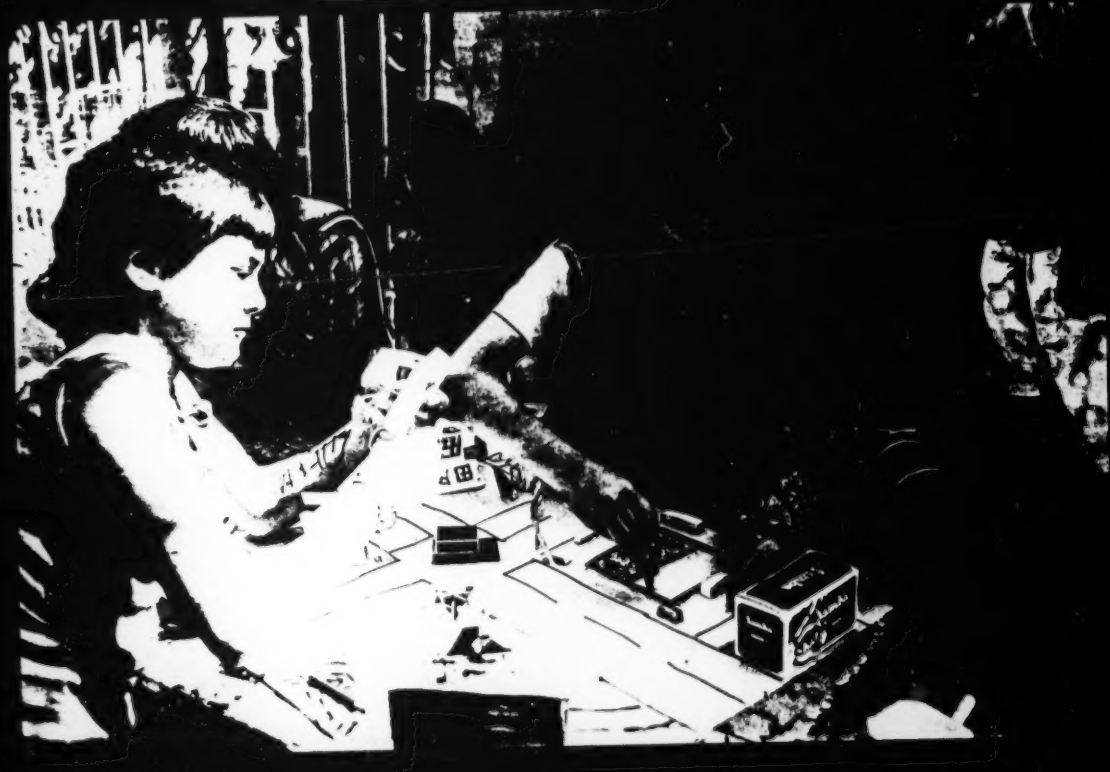

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All Children Can Learn

Chile's 900 Schools Programme for the Underprivileged

by Cynthia Guttman

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"We sing, sometimes we learn new songs, we play, we go off for walks with the tios, we are careful towards nature. The tía taught us how to be tidy and to work quietly."

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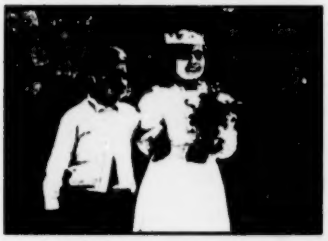
INTRODUCTION

Nataly Leon and Hector Echeverria are children of Chile's 900 Schools Programme, launched in March 1990 to improve basic education in the country's most impoverished public primary schools.

For Nataly and Hector, the highlight of the programme, which they were exposed to in third and fourth grades, were the twice-weekly learning workshops after school, run by young people from their community, whom they affectionately called "tía" and "tío." "We learnt a lot of new things; we did drawings, we painted and played," recalls Nataly of the workshops, designed to heighten children's self-esteem and help them overcome learning difficulties through projects encouraging individual expression. Boosted by this reinforcement, both children obtained higher school grades. But for Hector, the experience had a further dimension: "Before, I was always alone, sometimes in the street. I felt like hitting my classmates," he says. Asked if he understood these feelings, he explained that his parents had recently separated. "In the workshops, I made better friends and was kinder towards them." Today, Nataly and Hector are in grade five. Both talk enthusiastically about school and about their ambitions: Nataly wants to be a school teacher, while Hector has his heart set on becoming a paramedic.

This sense of change and achievement is echoed in other interviews with children in the programme. All come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds: their parents earn an average 27,000 pesos ($ 58) a month and either live in marginalized urban or rural areas.

Today, three years after it started, the 900 Schools Programme (P-900), made possible by grants from Sweden and Denmark, involves 1,089 schools, 180,788 first to fourth-grade students (20 per cent of the total students in this category) and 6,494 teachers. It aims to help students with reading, writing and mathematics, by a modified approach to teaching and a broad range of activities attuned to the children's environment, combined with better-equipped schools.



Although spearheaded by the government, the P-900 sees education as everyone's job, involving non-governmental organizations and the community in making school a place "where all students learn," as one of the programme's slogans runs. Its innovative pedagogical strategy is of potential interest to policymakers and education specialists in both developed and developing countries where children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds often fail to acquire the foundations of learning during their first school years.

The 900 Schools Programme: A Summary

Announced within days of Chile's return to democracy in March 1990, the 900 Schools Programme aims at improving the quality of education in the country's most impoverished public primary schools, by "positive discrimination".

The programme tries to use existent resources to give all levels of the educational hierarchy — supervisors, directors and teachers — a more pedagogical vision.

The key to the programme's teaching method is its consideration of the children's experiences, knowledge and language as the seed of all further learning. Teachers are encouraged to cultivate this universe and create a more participatory atmosphere in the classroom. To reinforce learning in reading, writing and mathematics, students in grades three and four with learning difficulties attend special workshops conducted by local tutors chosen by the school. By involving the community and non-formal methods the programme aims to make education "everybody's business."

The programme has invested on five main fronts:

1) Improving the infrastructure of schools.

2) Conducting weekly in-service training workshops for teachers in the school to introduce them to the programme's methods, change their perceptions of the children's background and provide a forum for discussion.

3) Providing specially-designed didactic materials for mathematics, reading and writing; equipping grades one and two with classroom libraries and supplying teachers with manuals detailing instruction techniques. Printed materials, including children's notebooks, are provided for the learning workshops. Schools also received tape recorders and mimeograph machines.

4) Complementing the distribution of textbooks in language, mathematics and sciences to ensure all primary students in P-900 schools have their own books.

5) Holding learning workshops after school for children with learning difficulties. The workshops are run by tutors chosen by the school from the community who have an interest in education and social issues. The tutors are trained by supervisors.

The programme was developed in collaboration with several non-governmental organizations which work with children from underprivileged areas.

Made possible by grants from the Swedish and Danish governments, the programme began in 969 schools identified on the basis of low results obtained in a nationwide quality of education test, known as SIMCE. To date, the programme has reached 1,456 schools, involving 235,183 students and 7,000 teachers.

1. The Chilean Context

At first sight, Chile's position is one of the most enviable in Latin America: a nation of 13 million people occupying a ribbon of land 4,500 kilometres long, it enjoys a 93.4 per cent literacy rate. Today, 96.4 per cent of children between 6 and 14 are enrolled in school, a figure that has risen gradually since a law on Primary Education was passed 70 years ago. They are likely to remain in school for an average 7.5 years, just below the eight compulsory years. Approximately 35 per cent of schools are private and charge tuition. The rest are state-subsidized, whether private or municipal. Chileans tend to value education highly: lower classes perceive it as a passport to better living conditions and eventually participate in their country's social, economic, cultural and political life. In a forthcoming ethnographic study of 10 families done in impoverished suburbs around Santiago, a majority of parents stressed the importance of education and their concern about the quality of their children's schools.

Despite this, the picture is clouded by deficiencies in learning achievements, especially in poverty areas. Even when students do complete the first years of school, many do not have the basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills essential to further social advancement. This was illustrated by discouraging results in performance evaluation tests done in 1982, 1984 and 1988, which inspired the P-900, a programme of "positive discrimination" targeting primary schools in poverty areas where the quality of teaching and learning was particularly low. The programme was announced the day after the democratic government of President Patricio Aylwin took power on March 11, 1990, ending 16 years of military rule.

The timing of the programme's inauguration was a political statement of the government's desire to reach those forgotten by the "Chilean miracle," the result of the economic liberalism preached by the "Chicago boys" after the severe recession of the early 1980s. By 1990, economic growth was 4.5 per cent per year, inflation 10 per cent and unemployment 4.5 per cent. But the "miracle" was not shared by all. In 1990, about 44 per cent of the population was unable to satisfy its basic needs. Today, "poblaciones," or poor quarters, continue to spread behind Santiago's affluent facade with 780,000 people classified as "indigentes" (destitute) and over three million earning less than 100 dollars a month.

Pledging to "repay the social debt," the new democratic government vowed to invest in three domains — housing, health and education — in order to improve the lot of the neediest.

"There will be no democratic and modern society in Chile if we do not prepare a new generation and if we fail to give all children the same opportunities of access to a quality education, those today who are privileged and those who are disadvantaged," said President Aylwin in May 1990. "Both will share the Chile of the 21st century. They will contribute to the country's development if they receive an education that allows them to understand and participate in a modern and democratic society."

2. The Military Regime's Legacy in Education

In education, a drop in resources (in 1988, only 2.7 per cent of the GNP was spent on it compared with 4.2 per cent in 1970) and a twin policy of decentralization and privatization contributed to a decline in the quality of education, especially in underprivileged areas.

Decentralization involved shifting administrative responsibility for schools to municipalities whose wealth largely determined what educational materials schools received. This put low-income areas at a disadvantage and also broke the spine of one of the country's biggest and most powerful trade unions. No longer employees of the state, teachers lost their job security and often suffered sharp cuts in salary. The measure was also a sophisticated system of control since mayors were hand-picked by the military ruler, General Augusto Pinochet. In turn, they often appointed school directors, creating a highly-politicized educational network.

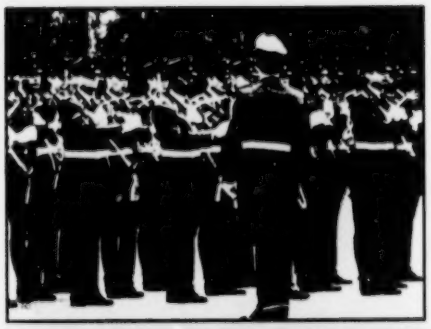
The system allowed creation of private schools, which were entitled to a subsidy for each student. The result was a proliferation of schools competing with municipal ones. Submitted to the laws of supply and demand, schools trumpeted the extras they could offer, such as free transportation or smart uniforms. They played up to a myth prevailing among parents that private schools were synonymous with higher quality. It was reasoned that demand would lead to higher standards. "In practice, people don't know what to ask for", says Johanna Filp, a researcher at the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CIDE).

Primary student enrolment in private-subsidized schools rose from 14 per cent of total enrolment in 1980 to 31 per cent in 1989. In municipal schools, this share decreased from 80 per cent to 62 per cent in the same period. It did not follow that decentralization led to higher quality. That schools were not teaching students basic skills was shown in a national educational quality test in 1988 (SIMCE) which revealed that the national average of learning targets reached in fourth grade was only 54.2 per cent in Spanish and 51.8 per cent in mathematics.

Experts estimated the scores of public schools trailed those of private ones by at least 25 points. In Spanish, the highest scores were registered in the private paid primary schools located in the high income neighborhoods of Santiago, while the lowest scores were recorded in the rural municipal schools. This gap widened in the 1982 to 1988 period. The test provided the data that enabled the transitional democratic government to identify schools where performance was lowest. Poor achievement coincided with low socio-economic status, reinforcing the idea that positive discrimination could achieve a fairer distribution of education and ensure the most underprivileged not only had access to education, but could acquire reading, writing and mathematical skills, the roots of all further learning.

The flourishing of the non-formal sector

Over the same period, between 1977 and 1990, educational experiments flourished in the non-formal field and were generally aimed at the poor. "Popular education" grew under the aegis of the Church and non-governmental organizations, notably the PIIE (Interdisciplinary Programme for Educational Research) and CIDE, which helped communities join forces to solve their own problems. Focusing largely on education in underprivileged areas, researchers collected knowledge,



1. Military parade

2. Mural painting in Santiago

3. Working with materials specially designed for the programme

made innovations and gained insights that later became the seeds of the government's programme to address shortcomings in the quality and fairness of education.

As early as 1974, CIDE started to look at the quality of education in primary schools in underprivileged areas. "We were thrown out of the schools at first," says Filp, recalling an era of persecution, generally aimed at the politically active people in the institute rather than the institute itself. Supported by foreign grants, CIDE gradually won respect and was left to do its work. According to Filp, this acceptance was the government's "way of showing it was not a dictatorship."

The PIEE's expertise is popular education. In 1977, it spearheaded an experiment to involve youths from the "poblaciones" of Santiago in alternative educational projects with children from their community. For eight hours a week, over 10 months, they involved children in highly participatory activities, creating bonds within the group and encouraging them to be creative with materials adapted to their environment. The programme was very successful, winning legitimacy in the eyes of the community and recognition by teachers of progress in many of their students who attended the weekend workshops.

The main lessons gained from these actions centred on the importance of involving the community in learning and recognition that children from the most destitute backgrounds can learn if activities are tailored to the reality of their daily lives. Encouraging them to communicate and valuing their experiences in a nurturing environment helped increase their self-esteem, sense of responsibility and motivation to learn. The transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one was an unprecedented opportunity for NGOs to become high-level decision-makers and formulate educational policy. "This seemed like utopia become a reality for many of us, since we had put all our efforts during the 16 years of dictatorship into constructing a solid base of knowledge about our educational reality which could serve as input for policy-making," says Filp. "This was our hope, and when it became a reality, it seemed like a dream."

CHILEAN INDICATORS

Population:	*13.173 million*
Annual average growth rate:	*1.7%*
Percentage urban population:	*85.6*
GNP growth (1991):	*5.5%*
GNP per capita:	*US$ 2,217*
Total foreign debt (1992):	*US$ 17,150 million*
Inflation (1992):	*18.7%*

EDUCATION

Illiteracy rate:	*6.6%*
Net enrolment ratio:	*87% (1989)*
Percentage of repeaters in basic education:	*3.7% (1990)*
Percentage of female teachers:	*74%*
Pupil-teacher ratio:	*36*
Percentage spending on education (as % of GNP):	*3,6*
Expenditure on basic education as % of total:	*52.51*
Private enrolment as % of total:	*38*

Sources:
L'État du Monde 1993, Éditions La Découverte.
UNESCO World Education Report 1991.
Anuario Estadístico 1991, Ministerio de Educación.

A glossary to the P-900

The Programme of the 900 Schools became known as the P-900 for short because of the number of participating schools at the outset, in 1990.

CIDE: *Centre for Educational Research and Development.* Founded in 1964, the centre has made several evaluations since the 900 Schools Programme began in 1990.

MECE: *Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad de la Educación*, or Programme to Improve the Quality of Education. The programme is supported by the World Bank.

PIIE: *Interdisciplinary Programme for Educational Research*, a non-governmental organization with over 12 years' experience in developing learning workshops. PIIE is a key partner in the P-900.

PME: *Proyecto de Mejoramiento de la Educación*, or Project to Improve the Quality of Education. Schools which have improved in achievement levels are encouraged to prepare their own quality of education project in order to be elegible for a World Bank-supported grant from MECE. When a grant is made, the school opts out of the P-900.

SIMCE: *Sistema de Medición de Calidad de la Educación.* A system created under the military regime to measure the quality of education. Results in 1988 provided the data by which P-900 schools were identified. The average fourth grade student at national level gave correct answers to 54.2 per cent of the questions in Spanish and 51.8 per cent in mathematics. Results were poorer in schools in low-income areas.

3. The Programme's Guiding Principles

A democratic perspective runs through the programme, calling at all levels for a change in perception on the part of the actors involved — students, teachers, directors, supervisors, families and the community — along with a vision of education that primes personal initiative, participation and responsibility. The predominant importance of the child's social and cultural environment is at the heart of the programme's initiatives. Teachers are trained to respect and cultivate it as the basis of all further learning. Education continues outside the classroom with the participation of young people from the community who help children in special workshops inspired by programmes tested during the 1980s in the "poblaciones." They help to break a vicious circle of poor achievement in school reinforced in the child's home.

This sensitivity to the ways marginalized people speak about their world is not new to Latin America. The indigenous movement of the 1920s sought to defend and preserve values stifled by colonisation. In the 1930s, there was the "Escuela Nueva" movement. These currents revived in the 1960s, notably through Paulo Freire's writings on the social and cultural universe of the poor as a starting point for empowerment and learning. With the impact of Vatican II and the spread of liberation theology in Latin America after the 1968 Medellín conference, developing an alternative to the formal educational model came to be synonymous with freedom, transformation and democracy.

The P-900 fits into this tradition, updated and enriched by recent initiatives, observations and research in the non-formal sector during the military regime.

"We visited a shoemaker, he showed us a lot, such as how boots are made. During a visit to the clinic, we learnt how babies are born."

4. Dynamizing the Structures

Researchers identified several barriers to quality learning levels in poverty areas, beginning with dilapidated school buildings. When classrooms were being evaluated before the beginning of the P-900 programme, one researcher described schools in poor urban neighbourhoods and rural areas: "There are rows of broken and worn-out desks... windows are often patched up with paper. Most classrooms are cold, dark, small and barely isolated from outside noise... Some children erase the first pages in their notebook in order to write on them again. In addition, there is often no running water in the bathrooms."

Beyond this material barrier to quality learning lay a human one, formed by teachers. They often blamed educational failure on the family or the child and had low expectations of their students. Although teachers attend university or a special institute for an average of five years, their often heavily theoretical training does not prepare them to work in poor communities. Studies by CIDE in the 1980s observed that teachers' attitudes differed in middle-class and poor areas. In the latter, relations between teachers and students were more authoritarian, with little classroom participation, and they tended to ignore and devalue the culture of the students. The paucity of instruction materials, combined with a curriculum divorced from real life experience further contributed to low achievement.

Rather than radically change the system, the P-900 strives to revitalize the educational structure with methods and approaches partly inspired by the "non-formal" sector. "We tried a new methodology anchored in the tradition of teachers. We don't present it as an innovation, but as a winning back of teachers' traditions," explains Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro, the programme's first coordinator. "For teachers and school principals, there is always a gap between a desired role and the one actually carried out. To change people's methods, it's better to take this desired role and supply the means to narrow the gap. It's the same with the children: start with their lives, with what is meaningful to them."

"The tías are good to us, they teach us how to work, they help us with homework. When the teachers give us something that we can't do at home, the tías show us."

5. Pillars of the Programme

The programme seeks to tackle these physical, pedagogical and psychological issues and change the perception of the school in the community. Although the programme has been fine-tuned over the past three years, it continues to operate along the following lines:

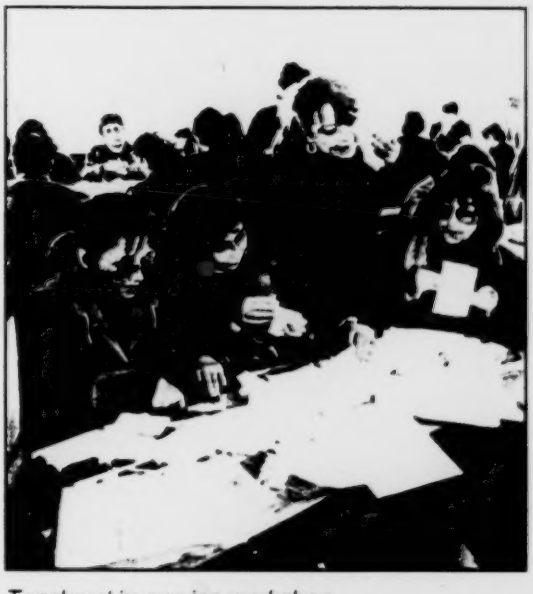
a) Improving infrastructure

A questionnaire asked schools about the kind of repairs needed. A total of $4 million was spent on improving 800 schools, bringing in new furniture, repainting classrooms, putting in sanitary facilities, etc. The work was contracted out to companies. Today, the P-900's logo, together with slogans such as "In this school, everyone learns," identify the schools belonging to the project. Improving material conditions changed the school's study atmosphere and its relations with the community, generating a feeling of pride and dignity. "The classrooms are painted. There are no longer broken windows.... The new furniture is right for the size of the pupils, and the bright colours contribute to the lighting of the space...," writes one researcher. "Both boys and girls are cleaner and better groomed. In a school still suffering from low prestige among the poorest families, the fact of seeing an improved infrastructure has created interest among the families to work towards rebuilding the school."

b) Focusing on the child's world

Held once a week at the schools, the teachers' in-service training workshops, conducted by trained supervisors from the Ministry of Education, emphasize a more interactive and creative approach to teaching. Focusing on reading, writing and mathematics in the first four grades, the workshops give teachers the tools to create a more dynamic interchange in the classroom and share some responsibility for their students' achievements. Workshops awaken teachers' sensitivity to the social and cultural background of students and suggest changes in teaching practices summed up in a proverb quoted in their mathematics manual: "If you give a person a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him to fish, you feed him for life."

"The workshops are valued, especially as they take place within the school," says Francisco Roa, a supervisor. "They did not exist before in this form. To have a



Teachers' in-service workshop

forum where teachers can talk about their basic role and their reason for being in the establishment is very precious. Communication between teachers is enriched and strength gained from exchanging positive criticism."

In teaching language, the starting point of learning is the belief that "new levels of language are reached from ones already known." With children from poor neighbourhoods, the language and images used in school are often far from the reality of their daily life. The P-900 encourages teachers to respect and stimulate expression by using children's own experiences as the basis for communicating, listening, writing, reading, understanding and thinking. Valuing the child's experiences is the source for developing thought, knowledge and curiosity about the wider world. "Children have their own language," says Patricia Leon Aranguiz, a third grade teacher. "In Spanish and Mathematics, we integrate the language they use at home. We live in the countryside, children see their parents working on farms. They use this vocabulary in the classroom." During "reading walks" through their neighbourhood for example, children become aware of all the written signs around them (street names, posters, names and prices of produce at the market). When they get back to the classroom, their observations are the starting point for language lessons.

Other concrete proposals include letting children talk about what they have done since the previous day at the beginning of the class, so reducing the distance between the school and their daily life. The children's oral culture — songs, poems, proverbs, stories and jokes — are considered precious stepping stones for learning how to read. Activities are tailored to enable working in groups. Children learn more readily if they make their classroom a literate environment. In many schools, they create a classroom journal by pinning up stories and happenings they wish to share, as well as letters received from other youngsters in the programme.

In mathematics, the knowledge already gained by the student in everyday life is highly prized for problem-solving. Extensive use is made of learning through games and developing thought and logical discourse based on the child's experience. Didactic materials include flannel boards to discriminate forms, sizes, colours and logical sequences, odd and even cards, number cards, money bills and colour cards.

The workshops are also a forum for critical reflection and enable instructors to take some distance from the daily pressures of teaching. Encouraging results are shared and problems arising in the classroom discussed. "We can only improve things that we see clearly. This is very important for knowing what to maintain, what to improve and what needs to be changed in the school and within ourselves, to help children learn more and better," says Rosario Solar, a local programme coordinator.

Textbooks and training manual for monitors and teachers

Teachers also receive manuals that are regularly revised in the light of problems and suggestions discussed in the teachers' workshops. The manuals present the programme and suggest ways of better acquiring language and mathematics skills. They are above all a framework for teachers to understand their own classroom and take initiatives to improve learning. Thanks to them, "my classes are livelier," says a teacher from Vicuña, "because I can do different kinds of work with my students. The children changed this year; I have given them more autonomy."

c) Distributing textbooks and educational materials

Because of the close relationship between school performance and the availability of textbooks, the Ministry of Education distributed 125,000 extra textbooks in language, maths, natural and social sciences in March 1990, and 185,000 the next year. In line with the programme's goal to use existing resources, they are the same as those used in other schools.

Materials especially designed for the programme include games such as movable letters, flash cards to teach final and initial sounds by reproduction and word lottery for reading and writing. These were distributed in all classrooms, which was praised by all the teachers, although many complained they did not get enough.

d) Creating the desire to read

The first and second grades now have small classroom libraries of about 40 books each. Schools were also given portable tape recorders, encouraging children to integrate their oral culture into the learning process. In all, 3,917 classroom libraries were distributed between 1990 and 1991. The library has had an "impact beyond what we expected," says Cecilia Jara, the programme's national coordinator, explaining that it has been a way of fostering ties between the school and the family, since children can take books home. In their training workshops, teachers are shown ways of gaining maximum advantage from the library: using the books for silent and oral reading, forming reading groups and searching for information. Children help organize the library: becoming familiar with the different parts of a book, colour-coding according to themes, creating a catalogue to keep track of loans. They take their turn being librarian, recording loans and checking that books have been returned.

e) Involving the community

This is the most innovative aspect of the programme, and the one that teachers resisted most. Developed by the PIIE, the workshops are run by members of the community under 30 and chosen by the school, for small groups of students (15 to 20) in third and fourth grades with learning difficulties.

"We created a link with the community, not the traditional kind where the school starts to ask for things from it, but by putting actors from the community inside the school for the sake of the school," explains Mr. García-Huidobro, the programme's first coordinator. "Often the school starts to have ties with the community, but it ceases to become a school and turns into a cultural or community centre, and the goal of learning is neglected. Here, we asked for the help of the community for a specific end."

The activities include raising children's self-esteem, creativity and sense of responsibility. They have their own exercise booklets, entitled "Discovering our ways of being and living," which they can take home. In them, children put their lives on stage, exploring their identity, environment and feelings, through activities that demand the use of reading, writing, mathematical and comprehension skills.

"We work with children who have learning and behaviour problems, and low self-esteem," says a monitor from the province of Talagante. "They feel worthless, marginalized and classified as weak. We treat them as people and show them they are valuable to us, their family and the community. For us, the challenge is to change their attitude, to make them value themselves and see they are capable of doing things."

The two-hour sessions are twice a week before or after school during the second part of the year, from

August to December. Although selection criteria for monitors vary from region to region, a highschool diploma is necessary.

In the first sessions, children establish bonds with their group and define its rules, such as the importance of listening and respecting one another. Over the next nine sessions, activities center on the child's knowledge of him or herself and family. In the next eight sessions, participants gain a better understanding of their community, visiting families and interviewing local authorities. Another eight sessions focus on discovering their country's geography, by drawing and illustrating a large map of Chile and organizing a day when products of each region are sold. At the end, students sum up their work and celebrate the experience with families and the community. The workshop leaders are important models for the children, stimulating their interest in learning and creating a secure and welcoming atmosphere in which rules, rights and obligations are understood.

The monitors are expected to communicate with the school director and teacher and establish a relationship with families, paying regular visits to keep them up to date on children's progress and make sure they see the work being done during the workshops.

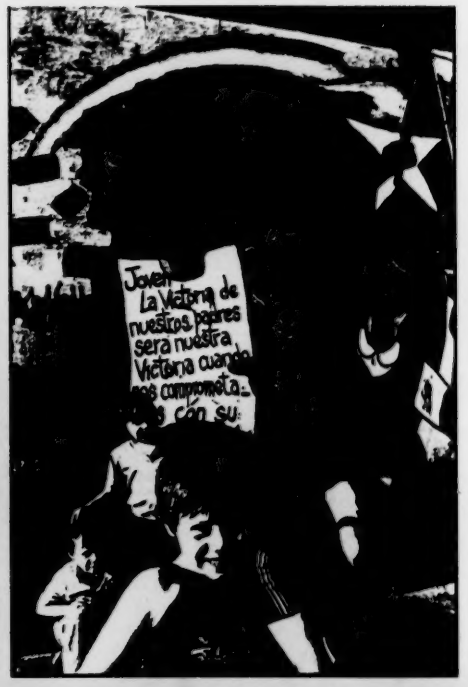
In 1992, about 2,500 youths were trained to lead these workshops, attended by some 50,000 students. Chosen by teachers, they are paid a stipend of 50 US dollars a month.

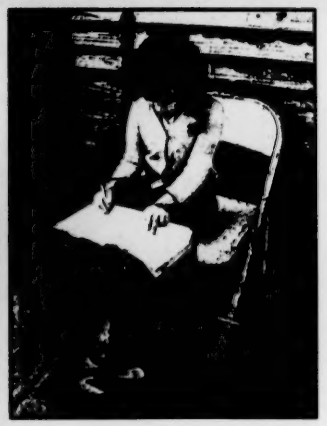
f) Growing by trial and error

Besides two external evaluations done since the programme was launched, regional coordinators and the programme's architects regularly visit the schools to assess changes in the classroom and identify problems. They also keep in close contact with the external evaluating team. External assessments have focused on measuring students' improvement in language and mathematics; analysing changes in teachers' practices and understanding what their improvements were based on; and assessing how the programme was received by supervisors, directors and teachers.

"Before working for the P-900 I didn't have a future. Now, as a monitor I can become a teacher's assistant. That's what I want to do."

1. *Playing games in the workshop*
2. *Children in front of mural, Santiago*
3. *Fish market in Lota, one of the towns reached by the programme*
4. *Coal miner in Lota*
5. *Low income rural family*
6. *Plaza de Armas, Santiago*
7. *School lunch*
8. *Cooking in Santiago shantytown*
9. *Girl doing homework, Santiago*





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6. The Main Actors

The programme is the result of pooling the talents of university researchers, non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Education. The learning workshops, for example, were developed by PIIE, a group with 12 years' experience in the field. CIDE provides expertise in evaluating educational projects.

At the central government level, the programme is the responsibility of the Undersecretary of Education. It is managed by a small team (four professionals, one secretary and an auxiliary) and a technical team specialized in the teaching of language and mathematics (eight people part-time).

Most of the administration is done through the Ministry's established channels. Rather than create an inflated central bureaucracy, policy-makers preferred to contract specialized institutions or link up with municipalities, companies, universities and independent academic centres. Many towns provide free transport for supervisors to visit programme schools in isolated areas and have helped reduce the bureaucracy slowing communications between schools and local authorities. One private company provided health insurance for workshop monitors. The study of physical repairs was sub-contracted to an engineering firm and carried out by the towns in charge of each school. Universities have done research projects in several P-900 schools. In 1992, university students completing a specialized education degree received credits for being monitors in the learning workshops.

In each of the country's 13 regions, the regional ministerial secretary named a regional and a provincial coordinator. Supervisors were then introduced to the programme. Each year, they attend three five-day training sessions with room and board paid. They learn how to run in-service training workshops for teachers and monitors and exchange their experiences in implementing the programme with supervisors from other regions. To date over 400 supervisors, all with over 10 years' experience, have followed these training sessions. Each supervisor has the responsibility for about three schools in the programme.

Because of their regular contact with the schools, the supervisors play a vital role in the programme and have been encouraged to take a more pedagogical approach. "One of the programme's positive traits is that it allows the supervisor to spend more time in schools and develop closer ties with colleagues," says Francisco Roa, a supervisor. "We have a better knowledge of the school and how teachers work. This allows us to better adapt the programme to the schools' needs."

The programme seeks to be flexible and strike a balance between centralization and decentralization. The key role of the central team is precisely to encourage provincial coordinators and supervisors to adapt the programme to the conditions in their regions. "The Programme of the 900 Schools should become 900 programmes in 900 schools," is one of the ambitions of the programme's organizers. This suggests that supervisors, directors and teachers understand the significance of the new teaching strategies enabling the programme to bear fruit despite differences between schools.

A start-up grant of $14 million

The programme received a $14 million start-up grant from the governments of Sweden and Denmark. The annual cost of the programme, not including building improvements, is currently $1,554,500. This works out

WHAT THE P-900 COST IN 1992
(US Dollars)

In 1992, the P-900 reached 1,123 schools, representing 191,451 students and 6,494 teachers.

1. Conduct of Programme

Technical team	
General coordination (three people)	20,211
Specialists (seven people)	54,000
Operative costs	
Transport/Travel	9,287
Secretarial facilities	8,658
Communications	18,750

2. Physical Improvements

Work remaining from 1991	86,195
Fixed costs	31,842

3. Educational Materials

Materials for learning workshops

Booklets for children	50,505
Materials	41,316
Classroom libraries	107,053
Didactic materials	127,324
Teacher training manuals	76,818
Monitor training manuals	19,211
Delivery and transport of materials	19,737

4. Pedagogical Support

Training of supervisors	15,763
In-service training workshops	35,026
Training monitors	149,192
Economic aid to monitors	605,716
Costs of school supervision	198,934
Total spending in 1992	***1,675,537***

at $2,300 per school annually, or $12 per student. The learning workshops are one of the most costly elements because of the expense of printing the materials for the children and paying the monitors. Food aid is provided by the National Board of School Assistance and Scholarships.

A total of $10.1 million - 40 per cent of the grants from 1990 and 1991 - went to improving infrastructure. Since 1992, all the infrastructure component has been paid for by the World Bank-supported Programme to Improve the Quality of Education (MECE). In 1993, library books and didactic materials are also being financed by MECE.

In 1994, the programme will be entirely financed by the state. Schools showing the best performances in the programme are eligible to present a proposal to the Project to Improve Education (PME), which is part of MECE. The schools' proposals compete with other projects to receive financing in the form of long-term low-interest loans. In 1992, 108 schools previously in the P-900 programme won loans from MECE, and so opted out of the P-900. The proposals often incorporate features of the P-900 programme, including the in-service training workshops and the learning workshops for children. "We thought the in-service training workshops were extremely effective," says Francisco Mondaca, a director whose project was accepted. "In our proposal, we have extended them from the fifth to eighth grade classes." In this way, the programme is a catalyst to schools, giving them tools to improve quality and eventually integrate themselves into running education on a more permanent basis.

7. The Early Days

The programme began with 969 schools, selected on the basis of scholastic performances indicated by SIMCE results, the number of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and the school's size and accessibility. About 10 per cent of the schools in each region met the criteria. No distinction was made between state-subsidized private schools and municipal ones. The regional and provincial coordinating teams visited the schools to introduce the programme and invite directors to participate. "Our attitude, in introducing the programme," explains Cecilia Jara, "was to say, let's build the future together, revise what we have, and do better." Once schools agreed to join the programme, a supervisor presented its contents to directors and teachers. "At the beginning, there was a certain fear towards the programme, we had doubts, we weren't sure how it was going to work," says Francisco Mondaca, a director. Another, Arnaldo Recabarren, agrees: "Our first reaction wasn't very good because the programme was aimed at schools with students showing the greatest learning difficulties. As we came to understand its meaning, we changed... Today, the school has changed and the children feel part of this change."

Materials reached most selected schools by June 1990, three months after the programme was launched. Some 5,237 first to fourth grade teachers attended training workshops during the first year.

"I would like to be a journalist", says Lucinda 10-years old.

8. Evaluations Highlight Learning Gains

An overall improvement

In 1990, a group of first, second and fourth grade students who had not been exposed to the programme was tested. They were tested again, after having benefited from the programme for a year along with a group of first, second and fourth grade students who had entered the programme from the start. Results showed better achievement in both groups, especially in mathematics (an average 9.2 per cent increase in second grade.) First-graders showed a 2.4 per cent increase in language averages over the group which had not been exposed to the programme from the start. Although this percentage may seem small, changes are rarely observed over such short time spells. Also, groups which scored lowest in 1990 made the most progress, while groups which did best did not drop in standard.

The programme had a greater impact on first and second graders. Several options have been put forth to explain this. The younger the class, the less exposure there had been to past teaching practices. Due to the timing of the evaluation, fourth grade students had been exposed to the programme for the shortest period. Also, the first and second grade classrooms have libraries, unlike other grades. Teachers praised the libraries as a stimulus to silent reading so their absence could be determining. Finally, the programme's pedagogy may be better suited to first and second graders than to higher classes.

Taking a bird's-eye view of the programme's overall effect, it emerges that 41 per cent of the schools increased their learning averages, 43 per cent maintained them and in about 15 per cent, averages dropped. To single out a sole reason for the drop would be to ignore a complex web of factors including high teacher turnover, directors' lack of involvement in the programme and a school's highly disadvantaged initial status. One of the programme's objectives this year is to focus on the special problems of these schools.

Winning back a pedagogical role

The programme broke a bureaucratic routine centred on administrative control and reemphasized the supervisor's role as educational leader. For 97.5 per cent of supervisors questioned in a recent survey, the programme's main benefit has been to enrich their professional practice. Supervisors running the in-service training workshops tended at first to interpret material too literally, which discouraged initiative by teachers. They often put themselves in the place of the children rather than the adults and demonstrated some of the didactic and mathematical games without explaining their significance or how they could increase a child's learning autonomy and self-esteem. This led to reformulation of the supervisors' training sessions by the programme's central team.

From doubt to gains

Nearly all 99 school directors questioned praised the in-service training workshops for teachers and said they had noticed changes in teaching practices. Most confirmed their school had received the programme's didactic materials. The learning workshops were valued by 99 per cent of directors. "Since being in the programme, I have attended the workshops and joined my colleagues in learning different techniques," said Marta Aravena, a director. "We all feel more confident." Sixty per cent of directors said they had become involved in the programme, by participating, for example, in the in-service training workshops.

Teachers give high marks to training and class libraries

"When we were told we would be participating in a new plan, I felt a little doubtful," says a third grade teacher, echoing the scepticism of many of her colleagues. "Little by little, I found it interesting and we changed our minds. The classroom libraries are fabulous, especially in poor schools. I see children, with the materials, are participating more." Her reaction is echoed by other teachers in an evaluation questionnaire. Textbooks and the classroom libraries are ranked as the programme's most valuable elements, together with the language and mathematics teaching manuals.

Of the 198 teachers questioned, 86.3 per cent were satisfied with the in-service workshops, which had introduced them to new teaching methods and led to good classroom results. "The programme has given new life to aspects of our teaching that we weren't doing very well. We were simply explaining things. We teach differently now," says a teacher in Puerto Varas. Teachers felt there was now less shyness, better oral expression and more participation by students. They also saw the workshops as a valuable forum to exchange experiences with other teachers. Problems most cited were lack of physical space for the workshops, scheduling difficulties and too much pedagogical work.

In the evaluation, observers noted a more interactive style in the classroom and new attitudes which valued the language and experiences of the children. Teacher prejudice towards poor children also lessened, as shown by such statements as "I never imagined they could talk so much, telling jokes or recounting events or their own experiences." Better attention and concentration and a desire to participate were also noted. Many children had a cleaner appearance and showed more care about their surroundings.

From reticence to approval

At first greeted with reticence, indifference and jealousy by teachers and directors who felt youths from the community could not play an educational role, the learning workshops are gradually earning points for improving children's self-esteem, motivation to learn and capacity to interact in a group: in a survey done last year, 93.7 per cent of teachers wanted them to continue. "The monitors' know-how has been very positive and valued by the children," says Francisco Roa, a supervisor. "One of the programme's achievements has been to bring these youths into the national education process."

Directors also acknowledged that the workshops allowed the children to stay at school all day, rather than be alone at home, or worse, on the streets. "Children gained confidence, increased their sense of belonging to the school, improved relationships with their friends and their standing as students," says Guillermo Vejar, director of a school in Recinto. Another principal, Amalia Mendez, noted that children who took part in the workshops had "more personality, better expression and communication skills than before." She tells of one boy "who was very difficult. He was violent, hard to talk to and wouldn't let anyone near him. You couldn't touch him. With the monitors, this changed. He saw them as closer to him and trusted them completely. Today, he is a normal child in fifth grade, and even lets himself be hugged."

The role of the supervisor in winning the acceptance of the workshops was always seen as critical. In the evaluation, teachers felt that monitors were ill-prepared to deal with discipline problems and complained about insufficient communication with them. Monitors in turn often spoke of teachers' indifference towards them. This attitude tends to keep the workshops on the margin, divorced from learning, rather than being a complement to it.

These observations led the team of programme specialists to organize a training day for supervisors to improve communications between these different agents.

Besides their impact on children, another beneficial aspect of the learning workshops has been heightened awareness by monitors towards inequality in their communities. Many have continued studies in this domain.

9. Continuing Issues and Challenges

The role of the director

As the programme enters its third year, the key role of the school's director has come into sharp focus. "If a director sees the programme as something belonging to him or her and motivates teachers, it begins to work," says Mr. García-Huidobro. "If the director accepts the programme but does not become involved, there is a certain improvement, but it is not obvious. If the director doesn't succeed in being a pedagogical leader, you could institute this programme or another and the result would be the same." When directors took part in the training workshops for teachers, evaluators found the school was more fully involved in the programme.

Activities have been accordingly devised by the central team to reinforce directors' leadership and discuss management and production of ways to improve learning in their schools. With the supervisors, directors are making a "diagnosis" of their school, with an annual improvement plan to understand their needs, raise their standards and evaluate previous work in cooperation with teachers.

Teachers' wages: motivation without financial reward?

Although the government introduced a minimum wage in 1990, teachers did not receive a raise for being part of the P-900. Today, teachers are paid about $250 a month, less than a secretary. "It is very hard to live on this in Chile, although it was worse under the last government," says Mr. García-Huidobro, the programme's first coordinator, explaining that about 40 per cent of teachers got pay increases after the 1990 law was passed. "More should be done, but it's very difficult because with so many teachers just a small increase creates a huge wages bill." Salaries are determined by various factors, including length of experience. Teachers' participation in the in-service training workshops of the P-900 is taken into account. Given the lack of any substantial wage increases, teachers seem partly motivated by the changes the programme has made in the classroom — repairs, supply of textbooks and manuals — all of them reflecting an interest from above in their vocation.

After improving their skills through the workshops, some teachers have left to work in more prestigious schools, showing the need for specific incentives to keep programme teachers. "We feel," says one teacher, "that all new responsibilities should go hand-in-hand with economic incentives."

Gender: a secondary issue

Although attention was given in the didactic materials to the representation of boys and girls, gender is not a topic in the in-service training workshops or the learning workshops. A 1992 evaluation noted that teachers had closer relations with boys than with girls, accentuating a subordination traditionally strong in poor areas. Although girls "work quickly, with enthusiasm and enjoyment, often doing better than boys, their contribution is lost in the predominance given to boys' voices and contributions," the evaluation said.

Over 70 per cent of teachers at the basic education level are women, but this does not close the "gender gap" in the classroom. "Women teachers tend to have low confidence in their own abilities and it affects what they do," says Filp. They are also often obliged to hold

more than one job in addition to looking after their families. "We are faced with a complex vicious circle: teaching is not a valued professional option, but one for women with economic difficulties," write Jacqueline Gysling and Johanna Filp in a paper on the femininization of the teaching profession. They also note that women spend more time than men controlling the class, thus cutting into teaching time.

Can teachers get through the curriculum?

Applying a new methodology in the classroom altered the pace of learning: "The programme is excellent, but it takes a lot of time and patience to carry out," says a fourth grade teacher, Heliberto Camus, explaining that teachers are under pressure to fullfil the state-imposed curriculum. Since the country-wide SIMCE tests taken at the end of fourth grade cover nearly all this curriculum, teachers feel techniques encouraged in P-900 schools prevent them achieving the level of knowledge required to pass the SIMCE.

Giving special attention to high risk children

Special therapeutic, psychological attention must be given to high-risk children, many of whom have no family or have been the victims of aggression and violence. The evaluation shows pockets of poverty where living conditions are so deprived, materially and emotionally, that children only benefit from the programme with great difficulty. "Some of these children eat only three times a week," says Filp.

The location of some schools can cause problems. If near correctional centres, a school's student body tends to be mainly composed of children from it, reinforcing teachers' low expectations and putting a stigma on the school. Other schools, for economic or humanitarian reasons, become a haven for children who have lost their place elsewhere. They get names that stick like "the school of the terrible kids," again with a stigma, says Mr. García-Huidobro.

Family participation: a priority for 1994

Although the programme does not explicitly propose strategies for involving parents and other relatives, it encourages teachers and monitors to build such links. As parents notice the school changing, they often become more involved. Several directors say the learning workshops have broken the schools' isolation and changed parents' attitudes: "Parents feel very involved in the workshops. When we hold a meeting about them, nearly everyone attends," says director Arnaldo Recabarren. His views however, are not widely shared. A teacher in his school claims to have "no relationship with parents. Out of a class of 44 students, there are only about 15 whose parents think about how they can help." Another director feels "community participation has not been as satisfactory as I had hoped. We tried to motivate parents," he says, "hold meetings with teachers and change the time of meetings around, but the parents didn't come." One of the programme's aims has been to change teachers' attitudes to poor families so they do not blame them for childrens' learning difficulties. Family participation is a priority for the fourth year of the programme. Difficulty in involving families may also stem from a deeper problem: the persistence of a parents' poverty. The P-900 is only one aspect of development and in the short term, it cannot tackle the living conditions of families.

An external evaluation also notes that monitors do not forge enough ties with the children's families, but the monitors are not go-betweens between school and family.

Improving monitors' understanding of the learning process

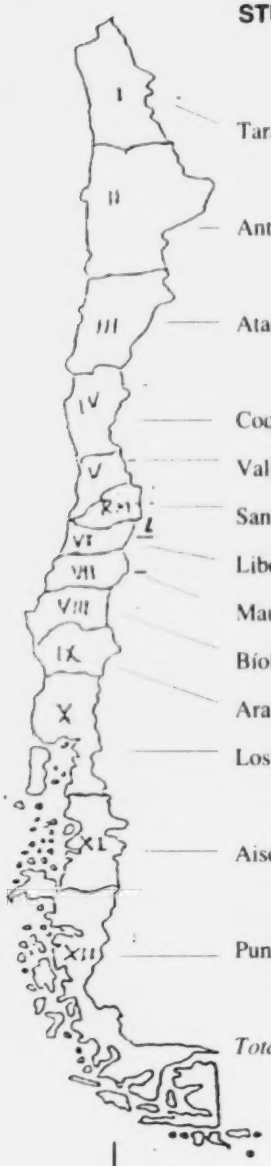
The learning workshops, because of their novelty, are still being integrated into the school system. In evaluations, monitors often showed an insufficient grasp of the meaning behind their activities. There is often an over-emphasis placed on "cariño," — affection — to the detriment of learning. Until teachers fully accept the

learning workshops, they risk being categorized as a marginal activity. In interviews, children did not seem to have a clear sense of why they were participating in the workshops. In some schools, joint training sessions for teachers and monitors has been considered.

Streamlining the selection of monitors

The criteria for choosing monitors vary from town to town. This directly affects the quality of the workshops. Monitors with no professional experience in education or community activities usually understand little in the sessions and often fall back on the "mothering" side of their function. But monitors with some experience in education tend to emphasize participation.

THE P-900 REACHES 15% OF CHILE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



	Students	*Schools*	*Teachers*
Tarapacá	7.260	20	204
Antofagasta	5.123	15	137
Atacama	2.375	13	68
Coquimbo	15.462	83	501
Valparaíso	18.750	113	645
Santiago	49.952	204	1447
Libertador	9.970	75	373
Maule	16.048	113	573
Bíobío	35.430	232	1270
Araucanía	24.676	188	861
Los Lagos	28.414	197	954
Aisén	2.420	10	79
Punta Arenas	2.802	7	78
Total	*218.682*	*1.270*	*7.190*

Facts and figures about the P-900

In 1992, the P-900, designed for children in grades one to four, reached 1,456 schools, involving 235,183 students, 7,000 teachers and 400 supervisors. Launched in 1990, it was made possible by a US$14 million grant from the Swedish and Danish governments.

Infrastructure improvements:
About US$4 million was spent on improving 800 school buildings, painting classrooms, repairing windows and putting in washrooms.

Textbooks:
In the programme's first two years, 310,000 textbooks were given to students in grades one to four.

Classroom libraries:
3,917 were distributed in first and second grade classes, respectively of 35 and 45 books. A leaflet recommending ways to make use of the library was written for teachers.

Didactic material :
Material for teaching of reading, writing and mathematics includes flash cards, dominos, word lotteries, movable letters, odd and even cards, money bills and number cards. In all, 300,000 units costing some US$ 226,000 were given to schools. Participating schools received 2,550 tape recorders for the classroom, 40 mimeograph machines and 1,216 ditto-machines to help teachers prepare for classes.

Learning workshops:
In the programme's first year, 34,000 children attended the learning workshops ("talleres de apprendizaje"), which were an average of 28 sessions of two-and-a-half hours each. In 1991, 50,000 children attended. The sessions, to reinforce learning through activities encouraging self-expression, are held before or after school. The same year, 2,766 tutors received training to run the workshops. They get a US$50 monthly stipend.

In-service training:
To help supervisors run the in-service training workshops, relevant publications were made available to regional and provincial secretaries of education, thanks to donations from the Spanish Institute of International Cooperation and UNESCO. Five videos were also produced for the in-service training workshops.

Communications:
A monthly bulletin entitled "Learning Together" is sent to participating schools. It includes an editorial by the programme's overall coordinator and inputs from schools.

10. Lessons: Sharing the Responsibility for Learning

Credibility:

By fulfilling promises, the programme quickly won credibility: three months after its announcement, repair work was well under way in several hundred schools and textbooks had started to reach the classrooms. The programme clearly has a voice of its own that is direct, fresh and encouraging. This comes through in the prefaces to the teachers' and monitors' manuals as well as in a regular news bulletin, "Learning Together", that includes an editorial by the programme's coordinator and contributions from participating schools.

Expertise:

The central team is composed of very technically-competent people with first-hand experience in education in underprivileged areas, mainly acquired at some risk during the military regime. Their personal commitment to the children adds energy and urgency to their work.

Clarity of objectives and a coherent strategy:

The programme was designed for Chilean society and enriched by the field work done by the Church and non-governmental organizations over the last few decades. Data from the SIMCE tests provided an X-ray of the country's educational shortcomings and allowed planners to identify potential programme schools.

Participation of non-governmental organizations:

This resulted from a unique political opportunity, the return of democracy and appointment to top positions of people who have done extensive work in popular education. Stressing innovation and development by trial and error, NGOs bring flexibility to the more conservative structures of the education ministry. Inclusion of "grass-roots" organizations in the conception and running of the programme reflects government willingness to accept new actors in the educational process.

Political will and external funding:

Without foreign grants and loans, the programme would not have been possible. The state has meanwhile assumed responsibility for the quality of education through a strategy of positive discrimination

Training of teachers:

Quality will not improve without a critical look at teachers' practices. Coming at the end of a period of repression that had bruised the profession, the in-service training workshops gave teachers a personal and professional boost, allowing them to use new materials and inject more life and participation in their classrooms.

Importance of textbooks:

Although they complained that they were not provided with enough for classes of 35 students, teachers said the delivery of textbooks and didactic materials was one of the programme's best features, especially as many poor children were hard put to bring a pen or pencil to school.

Community participation:

By their youth, energy and dedication, monitors have helped to bring the community and the children's family culture closer to the school. They have also fostered awareness, respect and responsibility in children towards their surroundings and often acted as much-needed role models. Children talk enthusiastically about the workshops. They have a sense of belonging to a group, of learning through games and projects, and being cared for and respected by the monitors. They recognize the workshops and the informal learning environment have made them better students.

"Now I can do the homework, learn how to multiply and behave well in the classroom."

Flexibility and permanent monitoring:

The communication between the programme's actors has been widely praised. This has allowed the programme to be fine-tuned as it was implemented: teachers' manuals have been rewritten and updated in the light of the experience in the in-service training workshops. The regular visits by the central team to the provinces has further motivated participants.

Decentralization:

While the central team defines directions and provides resources, much emphasis is on adapting the programme to the characteristics of each region and, more precisely, to each school, through the provincial coordinators and the supervisors.

Maximizing use of existing resources:

The programme aims to reorient teachers, directors and supervisors away from bureaucracy towards pedagogy. Infrastructure improvements aside, the programme's resources have been mainly geared to training and production of materials.

High-risk areas:

Innovative programmes in basic education are not enough to tackle the needs of children severely deprived of material and emotional security.

Conclusion

Educational democracy: the commitment to education for all

At all levels of the educational pyramid, the P-900 emphasizes the overriding importance of learning: supervisors and directors feel that their work has shifted from the administrative to the pedagogical, while teachers have opened up to new ways of running a classroom and stimulating learning. One of the programme's greatest successes has been to overcome political cleavages left by the dictatorship — a large number of directors and supervisors were appointed during this era, when "popular education" was taken to mean leftist thinking.

From being regarded with scepticism by most teachers and directors, the programme has gained legitimacy since its launch in 1990. Along with provision of materials, one of its most highly-valued features has been the in-service training workshops for teachers that reaffirm their fundamental role in the learning process.

The programme lifted education out of a tight straight-jacket, forming partnerships with non-governmental organizations and drawing on their experiences in the non-formal sector which flourished during the military regime. The central team counted on the switch from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one to "institutionalize" experiences from the non-formal sector. Despite differences from school to school, an overwhelming majority of teachers have accepted the value of the learning workshops in raising children's self-esteem and improving their performance in class. This rapid integration of the non-formal sector into the mainstream education system is one of the programme's most innovative aspects. As "positive discrimination," it lights the way towards a broader vision of education, tailored to the needs of specific groups.

Other aspects of the programme are attracting the attention of educationalists: several supervisors and directors say they want to see in-service training workshops at secondary level. Cooperation with universities could influence and sensitize future teachers to problems of students from poor areas by focusing on the child's cultural environment and pointing out inherent class biases in a curriculum.

The recognition at the highest level of state that some children are failing to acquire basic skills during their first years in school is the start of a critical look at practices that tend to be carved in stone. By treating quality and access equally through a policy of positive discrimination, the state gives itself a key role in change, entrusting actors at the local level with tools to improving children's performance.

How durable is the programme? Can its initial energy be sustained? By stressing flexibility, the P-900 retains an innovative edge and continues to evolve in the light of experience and evaluations, without losing sight of its main goal: to improve learning in the country's poorest schools. The in-service training workshops and learning workshops often become permanent features in schools, evidence that a state-led innovation has borne fruit. After a careful diagnosis of needs, the programme acts as a catalyst for more permanent changes in learning.

At the heart of the programme is the belief that education, if delivered the right way, can make people active learners, and eventually actors, in their community, giving them a sense of possibility, aspiration and responsibility. It is a renewal of a more humanistic approach towards teaching and its main beneficiary, the child.

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This publication is the first in a series presenting promising innovations in basic education.
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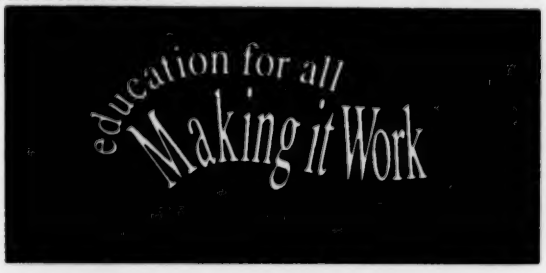
Announced within days of Chile's return to democracy in March 1990, the 900 Schools Programme aims at improving the quality of education in the country's most impoverished primary schools. To date 235,000 children have benefited from the programme, which tackles learning on several fronts: improving school buildings, providing classroom materials and regular teacher-training, and involving youths from the community in learning workshops for children. The key to the programme's teaching method is its consideration of the children's world as the basis of all further learning.

This publication is the first in a series which will present promising innovations in basic education that are of interest to policy-makers and educationalists.



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